

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY LISBON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3400

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

USMISSION NATO

DIA WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 3935

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDEV, PINT, PO

SUBJ: REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL SPLIT; SOCIALISTS PONDER NEXT STEPS

REF: LISBON 3905

1. SOCIALIST PARTY'S ABANDONMENT OF GOVERNMENT (REFTEL) EARLY THIS MORNING HAS SIGNIFICANTLY HEIGHTENED AN ALREADY TENSE POLITICAL SITUATION. WHILE LISBON WAS OUTWARDLY CALM TODAY, AND LIFE PROCEEDED NORMALLY, WE SENSE AN ALMOST PALPABLE AIR OF EXPECTATION. NEWSSTANDS, FOR EXAMPLE, WERE UNUSUALLY CROWDED AS KNOTS OF PEOPLE GATHERED TO LEARN OF LATEST DEVELOPMENTS AND EXCHANGE VIEWS. THE MAN IN THE STREET'S VAGUE PERCEPTION IS, IN FACT, CORRECT AND IS SHARED BY THOSE WHO FOLLOW EVENTS CLOSELY. IN SHORT, THIS CRISIS IS REAL -- WHATEVER ITS OUTCOME.

2. SOARES PRESS CONFERENCE: SOARES JULY 11 GAVE EARLY EVENING PRESS CONFERENCE TO AN OVERFLOW CROWD OF REPORTERS. HE SPOKE
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FOR AN HOUR REITERATING HARD LINE FROM SOCIALIST STATEMENTS

IN COMMUNIQUE ATTACKING THE AFM DECISION ON POPULAR ASSEMBLIES AND THE TURNING OVER OF REPUBLICA TO THE COMMUNIST-DOMINATED WORKERS. SOARES DID NOT REPEAT NOT ANNOUNCE ANY SPECIFIC COURSE OF ACTION FOR SOCIALISTS, BUT SAID PARTY DID NOT INTEND TO "LICK THE BOOTS" OF THE AFM. SAID HE WOULD ANNOUNCE SOCIALISTS' DECISION IN PRESS CONFERENCE NEXT WEEK. (DETAILS OF PRESS CONFERENCE IN SEPTEL.)

3. STRUGGLE IN REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL: MELO ANTUNES GAVE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT OF JULY 9/10 REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL MEETING TO RELIABLE EMBASSY SOURCE WHO HAS PASSED IT TO US WITH REQUEST THAT IT BE HELD CLOSELY. AS REPORTED LISBON 3900, PARA 7, THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL REMAINED IN SESSION FOR 14 HOURS UNTIL 6:00 A.M. YESTERDAY. ACCORDING TO MELO ANTUNES, THE SOLE SUBJECT OF THE LENGTHY, AND OFTEN HEATED, SESSION WAS THE ATTEMPT TO OUST VASCO GONCALVES AS PRIME MINISTER. THE ATTEMPT FAILED, ALTHOUGH GONCALVES' OPPONENTS WERE IN THE MAJORITY, BECAUSE PRESIDENT COSTA GOMES ADAMANTLY REFUSED TO PERMIT THE ISSUE TO BE BROUGHT TO A VOTE.

4. MELO ANTUNES HAD ORIGINALLY STAYED AWAY FROM THE COUNCIL MEETING, KNOWING OF THE MOVE AGAINST GONCALVES, AND ALSO KNOWING THAT HE WAS THE CANDIDATE -- IN FACT THE LEADER -- OF THE ANTI-GONCALVES FACTION. AFTER THE COUNCIL HAD BEEN IN SESSION FOR TWO HOURS, HOWEVER, COSTA GOMES CALLED MELO ANTUNES PERSONALLY AND INSISTED THAT HE APPEAR, WHICH HE DID.

5. ANTI-GONCALVES GROUP, ALL OF WHOM EXPLICITLY AND STRONGLY DEMANDED GONCALVES'S RESIGNATION WERE LED BY MELO ANTUNES, VITOR CRESPO, VITOR ALVES, CANTO E CASTRO, VASCO LOURENCO, AND SOUSA CASTRO. THEY WERE SUPPORTED LESS VOCALLY, BUT OPENLY, BY THE THREE MILITARY REGION COMMANDERS, CHARAIS, CORVACHO AND PEZARAT CORREIA. ANOTHER EIGHT OR TEN MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL WERE WITH THEM. THEIR ARGUMENT WAS THAT GONCALVES HAD FORFEITED HIS RIGHT TO BE PRIME MINISTER BECAUSE HE WAS A PCP FRONT MAN; THAT HE WAS ALSO INEPT AND RESPONSIBLE FOR THE COUNTRY'S WORSENING ECONOMIC CONDITION; AND THAT HE REPRESENTED AT MOST A MINORITY VIEWPOINT WITHIN THE AFM. VARIATIONS ON THESE THEMES WERE REPEATED HOUR AFTER HOUR, WITH MELO ANTUNES DOING MOST OF THE TALKING. MELO ANTUNES ALSO
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MADE THE POINT TO THE PRESIDENT THAT IT WAS RIDICULOUS TO PRETEND ANY LONGER THAT THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL WAS UNITED; THAT TO DO SO WAS TO MAINTAIN A FICTION WHICH WAS HARMING THE COUNTRY AND THE AFM; AND THAT WHAT WAS NEEDED WAS A CLEAR AND DEFINITE BREAK WITH THE LINE REPRESENTED BY VASCO GONCALVES.

6. THE GONCALVES FACTION WAS LED BY THE PRIME MINISTER HIMSELF. HE WAS SUPPORTED BY ROSA COUTINHO, JUDAS, RAMIRO

CORREIA, MACEDO, GUERREIRO AND ONE OR TWO OTHERS. UDAS AND ROSA COUTINHO WERE PARTICULARLY STRONG IN THEIR DEFENSE OF GONCALVES. THE GONCALVES FACTION ARGUED THAT THEY WERE CARRYING OUT THE TRUE WILL OF THE AFM, PARTICULARLY AS EXPRESSED BY THE ASSEMBLY, AND THAT THE ANTI-GONCALVES MOVE WAS REALLY DESIGNED TO DESTROY THE AFM AS A COHESIVE MOVEMENT.

7. OTELO SARAIVA DE CARVALHO HARDLY SPOKE DURING THE FIRST SIX OR SEVEN HOURS OF THE MEETING, BUT BECAME A BIT MORE ANIMATED AS IT DREW TO A CLOSE. FINALLY, HE CAME OUT AGAINST GONCALVES, STATING THAT, UNDER GONCALVES' STEWARDSHIP, "IMPERMISSIBLE THINGS" WERE HAPPENING IN PORTUGAL. OTELO ALSO SAID AT ONE POINT, LOOKING DIRECTLY AT GONCALVES, THAT THE PCP DOMINATED THE PRESS AND THAT THE "DIARIO DE NOTICIAS" HAD BECOME PRAVDA WHILE "O SECULO" WAS NOW "IZVESTIYA" BUT, FOR THE MOST PART, OTELO WAS QUIET.

8. THE PRESIDENT WAFFLED THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE 14-HOUR SESSION, PLEADING FOR MUTUAL TOLERANCE, RESPECT, AND CALLING FOR UNITY AND COHESION. IN RESPONSE TO MELO ANTUNES'S REPEATED REQUESTS FOR A VOTE ON VASCO GONCALVES, HOWEVER, COSTA GOMES REMAINED ADAMANT: THERE WOULD BE NO VOTE. MELO ANTUNES FINALLY PROPOSED A FACE-SAVING DEVICE: COSTA GOMES WOULD ASSUME BOTH THE PRESIDENCY AND THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP AND TWO NEW DEPUTY PRIME MINISTERS WOULD BE APPOINTED; THE RESHUFFLE THEREBY WOULD BE PRESENTED AS A TECHNICAL MOVE DESIGNED TO INCREASE THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFECTIVENESS. JUDAS JUMPED ON THIS PROPOSAL AND ATTACKED MELO ANTUNES FOR PROPOSING A "TECHNICAL MILITARY COUP." THE PRESIDENT DID NOT ACCEPT THIS PROPOSAL EITHER, SAYING THAT THE COUNCIL HAD TO MAINTAIN ITS UNITY AT ALL COSTS. FINALLY, MELO ANTUNES OFFERED HIS OWN RESIGNATION WHICH THE PRESIDENT ALSO REFUSED TO ACCEPT AND THE MEETING ENDED, AFTER 14 HOURS, CONFIDENTIAL

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WITH THE COUNCIL MORE BITTERLY DIVIDED THAN EVER BEFORE.

9. ANOTHER COUNCIL MEETING: THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL WENT BACK INTO SESSION AT 3:00 P.M. JULY 11, AND IS STILL MEETING. WE DO NOT KNOW WHETHER ALL OF THE COUNCIL MEMBERS ARE PRESENT; NOR DO WE KNOW THE SUBJECT OF THE MEETING, BUT ASSUME THEY ARE DEBATING THE SOCIALIST WALKOUT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

10. COMMENT: THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE NOW IS WHETHER THE MAJORITY MELO ANTUNES FACTION ON THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL WILL BE ABLE TO TURN THE SOCIALIST WALKOUT TO THEIR ADVANTAGE. IN ORDER TO DO THIS THEY WILL PROBABLY NEED A SHOW OF STRENGTH -- SOME PEOPLE POWER -- BY THE SOCIALISTS. WE ARE RELIABLY INFORMED THAT SOARES AND MELO ANTUNES HAVE

BEEN STAYING IN CLOSE TOUCH OVER THE LAST FEW DAYS AND THEY
WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE DISCUSSING COORDINATED MOVES FOR

THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE.
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